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ABSTRACT

In the midst of the economic recession of the early 1980's, two major facilities in Galesburg, Illinois, were closed down: a large private company and a state mental health facility which employed 15% of the local residents. The economic and social impact of these closures created a crisis for the town, its inhabitants, and service workers. In response, a number of agencies, including Carl Sandburg College, Illinois Job Services, the state government, and the Chamber of Commerce set up a task force to address the needs of displaced workers. A proposal for the creation of a Dislocated Workers Center was submitted and quickly approved. The Center is designed to address the displaced workers' needs for vocational retraining and job search assistance. It responds to the interests of workers by including union representatives on all hiring panels and ad hoc committees. Overall the success of the Galesburg Dislocated Workers Center Project indicates the kind of responses a local community can develop to similar crises and shows the role that community colleges can play in the area of vocational retraining and coordination of local resources. (HB)

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LOCAL INITIATIVE FOR DISPLACED WORKERS GENERATES STATE RESPONSE

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INTRODUCTION

Overall economic conditions in much of the midwest are desperate at best. Metal fabrication industries that have been traditional mainstays in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio have relocated to "SUNBELT" states and foreign countries at alarming and unprecedented rates. This migration within and from the United States has left in its wake a territory that has been tagged the "RUSTBELT" of America. "If the current recession were to end tomorrow, probably 1.2 million of the more than 11 million unemployed today would never be able to return to their old jobs in the automobile, steel, textile, rubber, or railroad industries" (Marvin J. Cetron). In addition to loss of modern and viable industry, Illinois in particular has been impacted with the closing and re-alignment of mental health

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facilities; a trend that has caused additional concerns and hardships in numerous regions of the state.

West Central Illinois has experienced the impact of the loss of both private and public sector industry. The city of Galesburg has suffered the closing of Outboard Marine Corporation which has relocated in Sardis, Mississippi, Hong Kong, and Mexico, plus the closing of a state mental health facility. At peak performance the two entities employed 4100 persons. With a population of 35000 people in Galesburg, Outboard Marine Corporation and Galesburg Mental Health Center represented the jobs of approximately 15 percent of the local residents. "The need to re-educate those who have already passed through the system is increasing enormously.....few of us have confronted the full massive implications of the fact that our life begins at 40" (Marvin Feldman).

There is no doubt that the decisions to dissolve, relocate or combine were made with utmost consideration by OMC and the Illinois Department of Mental Health. Unfortunately West Central

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Illinois, a geographic region long considered recession proof, came up the big loser with the net effect unemployment increased, underemployment, downward mobility, and considerable effect on the emotional well being of the populous.

This dual private/public plant closing has been instrumental in the creation of an environment that does not allow for the unemployed to transit from private to public sector employment which has been prevalent in past years at times of industrial downturn. In addition the situation that exists in Galesburg is also found in neighboring Peoria and Quad Cities (Moline, Davenport, Bettendorf, Rock Island). There is no option for commuting consequently.

For a town that has been described in the Wall Street Journal as atypical Midwest, Galesburg has taxed its leaders to exhibit creativity at local and state economic development agency levels, providing a most challenging time for the progressive Voc Ed leader, and A time of utmost despair in the lives of the less than progressive decision makers.

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CREATING A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHANGE

"Generally, training institutions and business firms prefer autonomy and will interact with each other when they believe that direct benefits will result. Therefore, the involvement of representatives of vocational education and business firms in economic development depends on the clear recognition of mutual benefits" (Paul V. Braden). Fortunately for the city of Galesburg and terminated employees of OMC and GMHC, a working relationship existed among and between the various economic development agencies, a relationship that has grown out of a history of joint responsiveness to local problems. "The role of the federal government is vital in helping men and women who may be underemployed, or displaced by technology, or in need of retraining. To help them is an investment in the country's future and an improvement of the present conditions for everyone" (Jesse Jackson). Carl Sandburg College, Illinois Job Service, State Government, Job Training Partnership Act, and referral agencies such as the Knox County Board and Galesburg Chamber of Commerce

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together provided the imputus for the establishment of a task force consisting of local decision makers who were willing to overlook questions of territorialism which are often barriers to collective action in addressing local problems. "The members of the task force..... have been extremely cooperative in the establishment and operation of the dislocated worker program," (Jerry Miller, Mayor for the city of Galesburg, Illinois).

CREATING A PRODUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHANGE

Generally communities that encounter a major loss of industry are unwilling to face realities of the inevitable until after the fact. In this situation the collaborative effort not only produced a well written proposal for a Dislocated Workers Center, it also harnessed a broad base of community support for the project; a base consisting of the desperate elements of the community that was exemplified by the fact that educational, elected, and union officials addressed all major concerns setting up the center with no serious conflict.

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CREATING A PRODUCTIVE DELIVERY SYSTEM

The responsiveness of the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs in recognizing the need and the commitment by Governor Thompson to provide vocational retraining to West Central Illinois resulted in a three day turn around from the submission of the application to state approval for funding the proposal.

After the initial enrollment process the community college had time to develop a delivery system that would be responsive to the needs of displaced workers. Consequently, the workers needs were encompassed in the development of the system through union representation on all hiring panels and ad hoc committees. The community college did not arbitrarily develop a delivery system that was convenient for the existing structure; a system was established tailored to OMC/GMHC dislocated workers needs; a system where the staff are receptive to union comments and recommendations and flexible enough to make the appropriate changes in a timely fashion.

CONCLUSIONS

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The success or failure of the Galesburg Dislocated Worker's Center cannot be attributed to the "LUCK OF THE DRAW". Success came as a direct result of an exceptional effort and initiative at the grass roots level. Failure to retrain for local jobs would come as an extension of and resulting from the adverse economic conditions of the region, and only after all avenues have been exhausted by the economic development change agencies. Failure would mean relocation for the worker.

The unique quality of the Galesburg experience is that a small Midwestern community has established a leadership position in the state of Illinois in the arena of economic development by networking the total assets of the region. All the strings have been pulled; there are very few trade secrets among change agencies; there has been little margin for error and a limited likelihood for success.

The good news is that there has never been a more unified approach for self sustenance in the community. Few jealousies exist among change agencies that serve the economic development of

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Galesburg, Illinois. Each is a separate entity and a component of a more complete picture that has changed the non-traditional to the traditional in West Central Illinois with a philosophy that "it's not the workers who are dislocated. It's our values that are dislocated. And unless we keep the workers maintained as well as our machines, the national purse is going to be dislocated" (Paul E. Barton).

To maintain and sustain our displaced workers, the Dislocated Workers Program has addressed the critical needs of vocational retraining and job search assistance. The center was established to provide a basis for a more productive and fruitful future for the dislocated worker. "The overall scope of the program can give some semblance of order to someone's life, who does not know how to start looking for a job," said Audrey Allaman, Allaman, union representative from Galesburg Mental Health Center. "It can give a person a sense of direction. It is devastating to lose a job after many years; when people have no other skills they don't know what to do next!"

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SUMMARY

The story of Galesburg's Dislocated Workers Center Project for Outboard Marine Corporation and Galesburg Mental Health Center workers needs to be told. It is a kind of effort that all communities can make in the face of a crisis. It is a story of many agencies working together to assist those struck by an economic disaster beyond their control. It was a very satisfying and is a very satisfying project for those involved from all sides.

The key to the entire effort is establishing an environment where cooperative efforts can flourish. While there is no guarantee that any one effort will meet with immediate success, the overall imperative is that community colleges move strongly into the area of vocational retraining and coordination of local resources. No effort in pursuit of the goal of assisting in community projects is wasted.

In the next year and a half this project will serve approximately 600 persons. More importantly, it will leave a strong model for more collaborative

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efforts within the community. Galesburg is no longer the typical Midwestern town that has been brought to national prominence through the Wall Street Journal. Galesburg is the atypical Midwestern town that has faced economic crisis repeatedly and survived through unprecedented local initiative. Galesburg has become the atypical Midwestern town that has learned that "every area of worklife is being altered...Where work is done, when it is done, how it is done, and how relationships among workers and between workers and their superiors are shaped." (Joseph F. Coates).

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